

## Rough Road to Glory: the Norwegian-American Press Speaks Out on Public Affairs, 1875-1925

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*Rough Road to Glory: The Norwegian-American Press Speaks Out on Public Affairs, 1875-1925*, by Arlow W. Andersen. Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press and Associated University Presses, 1990. 271 pp. Notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$38.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY LOWELL J. SOIKE, DES MOINES

Arlow Andersen's book brings to readers an examination of opinion offered by Norwegian-American newspapers on various national events and movements that drew America's attention during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many respects, this volume picks up the story where Andersen left off in his previous book, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847-1872*. Organized in similar fashion by topics and arranged in chronological order, the book also includes at the end two appendixes containing useful information on characteristics of Norwegian-language weeklies and data on the publication histories of the papers he examined.

Andersen's findings are based on his review of about thirty Norwegian-language newspapers. The major newspapers with larger circulation and more years of publication naturally receive the bulk of attention. Roughly two-thirds of the author's indexed newspaper references are drawn from nine of the thirty papers, with three papers—the Chicago *Skandinaven*, Eau Claire (Wisconsin) *Reform*, and Decorah (Iowa) *Posten*—consuming one-third of the total.

If one newspaper stands out in the book as the preeminent reference point for, or bellwether of, Norwegian thinking, it is the *Skandinaven*, largest of the weeklies and more politically aggressive than the others. Its political connections to Republican hopes were embodied in Nicolay Grevstad, the paper's editor from 1892 to 1911. Grevstad became a close confidant of Minnesota's Senator Knute Nelson and held various Republican appointments while voicing unyielding Republican partisanship.

Andersen opens with a two-chapter portrait of his subjects: first, the character of the Norwegian-American press, and second, Norwegian immigrants' entrance into politics. Readers learn of the papers' political leanings, their part in shaping readers' attitudes—ethnic, racial, reform, and religious—and of their compatriots' reach for recognition in public life. Then, in thirteen subsequent chapters which together give roughly equal space to early and later periods, Andersen informs us about press thinking on individual issues that preoccupied the nation. These included industrial strife, agricultural unrest, America's rise to a world power, and progressive Republican turbulence. Less visible social themes are not neglected, as Andersen shares the

thoughts of Norwegian-American editors about women's rights, prohibition, immigration restriction, and racial attitudes toward Native Americans, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans. Two topics that claimed special Norwegian-American interest and pride also receive their due: the separation of Norway from Sweden in 1905, and the 1925 centennial celebrating the sloop *Restauration's* voyage from Stavanger to New York in 1825.

The result is a highly informative book, one that is enriched by a perspective drawn from Andersen's past research and a familiarity with materials from immigrant manuscript collections and other sources. The author's decision to emphasize broad topics of national and foreign affairs comes at some cost, however. Often, the attitudes of the Norwegian-American press differed little from those of the English-language press, for in this larger realm of public life, the Norwegians and their newspaper editors may have tended to follow the lead of native-born Americans. What was distinctively Norwegian in the immigrant press likely showed itself more often when it strived to shape the political and religious standpoint of Norwegian-Americans on questions animating state and regional politics or when doctrinal controversies assumed center stage—absorbing the immigrants' interest and touching their personal lives more deeply. This intensified feeling and division we sense in Andersen's chapter on "The Wisconsin Bennett Law and the Public School."

With the larger picture admirably brought into view, scholars may well be prompted, as the author hopes, to "examine more closely particular aspects of Norwegian immigrant responses to American public affairs." The editorial press of the politically volatile Red River valley in eastern North Dakota and western Minnesota comes to mind as do the "non-establishment" papers expressing radical political or religious views and, perhaps, the editors who fought against or defended Lutheran religious orthodoxy. Each such examination, building on Andersen's worthy contribution, will doubtless unfold to view yet other layers of serious debate that animated Norwegian-American life.

I noticed only one error of fact. Iowa's Governor Harding did not go down to defeat in 1918, as the author states on page 141, but instead won a narrow victory over Claude Porter in an election where Harding's anti-foreign language proclamation loomed large in political discussions.

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